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Postcard from the Edge (of Empire)

Elizabeth Adjin-Tettey, Gillian Calder, Angela Cameron,
Maneesha Deckha, Rebecca Johnson, Hester Lessard, Maureen Maloney
and Margot Young
University of Victoria, Canada

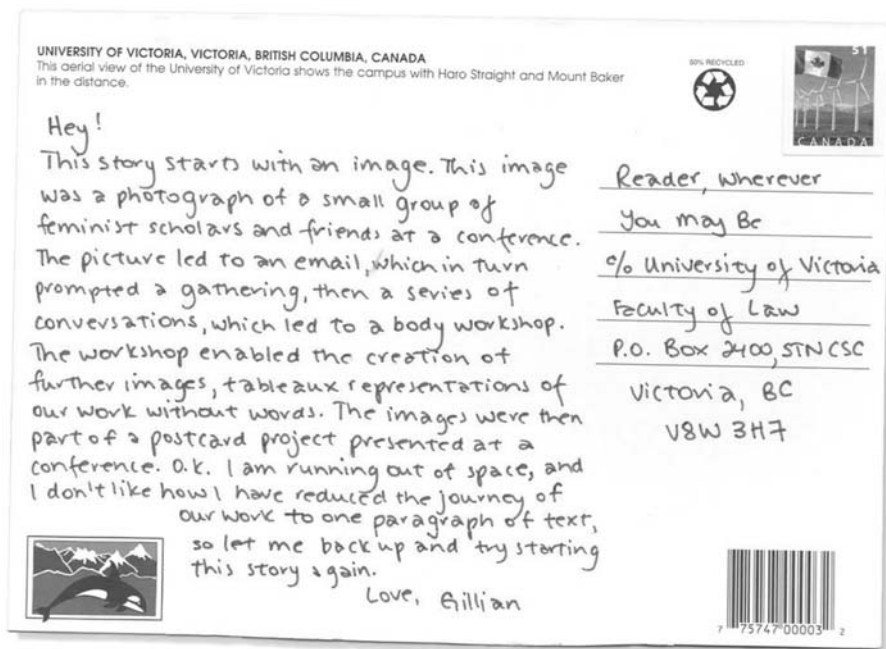
ABSTRACT

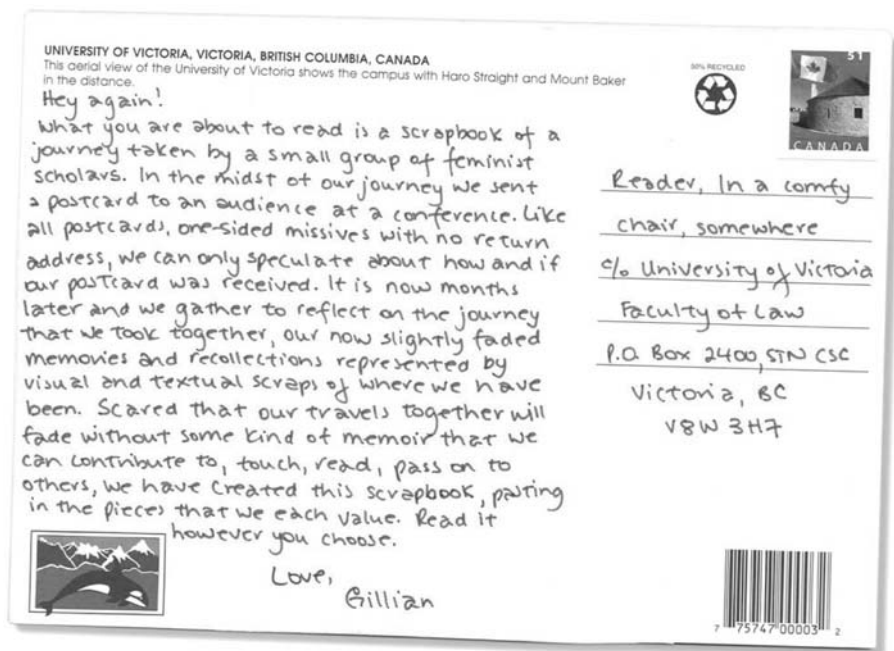
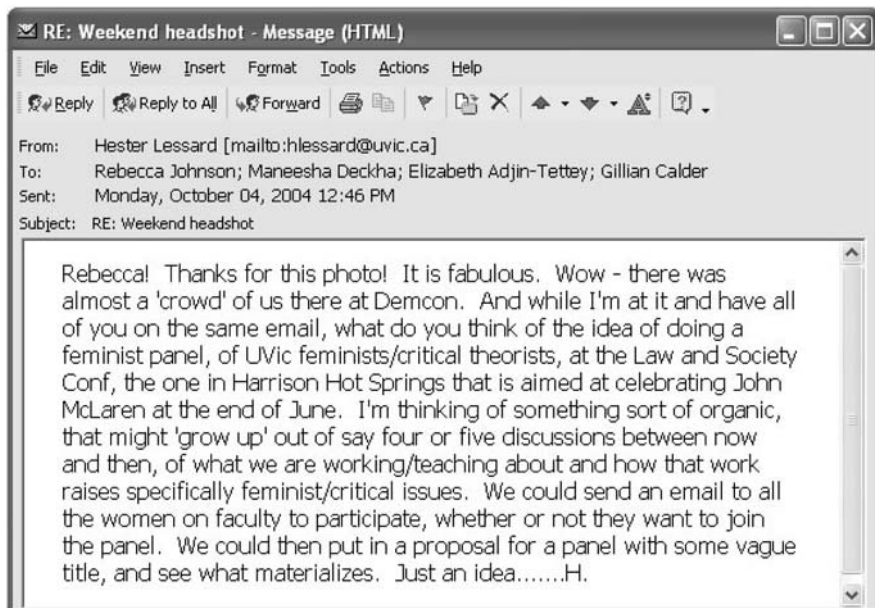
This article in scrapbook form represents the endeavour of the eight authors to document a recent, collective, academic journey. The project was one embarked upon as a means to explore tensions between the ideas of embodiment that connected our work, and the rigidities of academic convention. Using various media, this article strives, in substance and form, to provoke, challenge and confront its audience into dialogue, while simultaneously asking questions about the limits of our own legal imaginations.

KEY WORDS

collaboration; embodiment; feminist methodology; image theatre; performativity;
postcards; post-colonialism

PART I: THE JOURNEY





Memo

| | |
|---|---|
| To: | Postcard Collective |
| From: | Elizabeth |
| Subject: | Sidestepping Academic Conventions: Why We Chose to Publish This Piece as a Scrapbook |
| <p>This project is about subverting academic conventions and protocols relating to scholarly presentations, knowledge production, modes of representation and communication in academe. This is in line with our feminist and post-colonial resistance to domination of hegemonic processes. What might it mean for us to publish an account of our project not as a conventional scholarly article, but rather as a scrapbook/sketchbook/collage of the journey travelled, using a combination of text and images? Such a choice would be well grounded in reasons both epistemological and political.</p> <p>Epistemologically, we challenge the traditional understanding of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed and disseminated, and the relationship between the researcher/author and the audience/readers. Verbal communication, text and numbers are the conventional means of communication in academe and more generally the male-dominated western tradition. However, these modes of communication are restrictive and not necessarily the best means of communication, promoting understanding or good pedagogy. In addition, these are culturally specific modes of communication that do not reflect the experiences of other traditions. Politically, our choice of an alternative form of data representation could be a means of resisting the dominant forces that have constructed what is perceived as traditional academic conventions, including knowledge production and systems of knowledge, and how it disenfranchises the marginalized. This choice would situate our work at ‘the edge of methodological inquiry’ (Eisner, 1997: 4). This would be, in fact, consistent with the theme of this project as a postcard from the edge of empire, hoping to shed light on life on the margins of society.</p> <p>The scrapbook method could also provide readers with something closer to a virtual presentation of our journey through the use of textual and visual images rather than simply abstract descriptions of the process. It could provide the opportunity for us to document and share with our readers the various stages of our process as well as the final product. The collecting of visual images and documents might also provide us with a further occasion to learn as we reflect back on the path we travelled. The collagist or sketchbook methodology is consistent with the emergence of practice-led research (Vaughan, 2005). It is also a way of providing context for our readers, allowing them to draw their own understandings and conclusions from the images aside from the text we produce. In line with our goal of subverting academic conventions, this mode of presentation would stand as a challenge to the hegemonic language of academe and Western epistemologies that rely heavily on verbal and written communications. Among other things, this is because the conventional modes of communication marginalize visual and embodied forms of representation and systems of knowledge (Vaughan, 2005: 6).</p> <p>This need not mean that we completely abandon the use of written text as a mode of representation. Certainly, our performance at Harrison Hot Springs included</p> | |

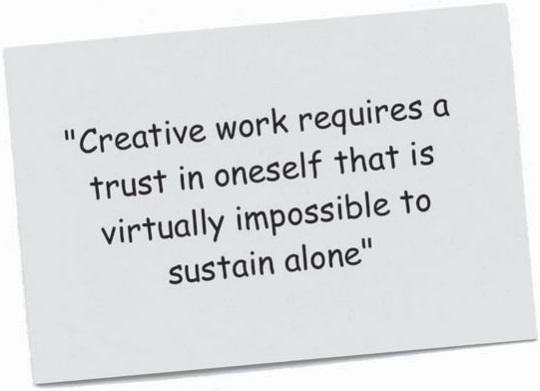
verbal communications. We might, however, want to harness the power of non-verbal communication by combining visual images, our embodied selves and text as a means of connecting with our readers (Vaughan 2005: 6). It could also be a way for us to concretize our theorizing in practice by giving our readers the opportunity to experience the marginality we experienced with the use of our embodied selves in creating the sculptures that comprised the heart of our performance.

The scrapbook method is part of arts-based research. It provides alternative forms of research, presentation, pedagogy and epistemology. As a pedagogical approach, the arts-based method challenges Western positivist academic conventions and modes of transforming research data into a public form. It relies on a combination of visual images and text as data. The visual images help to focus attention on the issues at stake and can be a means of persuading others into action. Images create empathy for the plight or suffering of others and an entry point into the lives of people on the margins in ways that are not possible with the use of text only (Eisner, 1997: 8). The use of non-verbal communication creates a certain level of uncertainty for the audience and readers as they must try to interpret the images for themselves. But the reliance on images also represents a departure from conventional mode of communication by decentring the researcher's/presenter's understandings of what the images depict or the message underlying those images. Arts-based research and presentation are considered a post-modern, post-colonial and feminist mode of generating knowledge. The multiplicity of meanings generated by visual images can in fact be contradictory. However, this does not undermine the legitimacy of arts-based mode of generating knowledge. Rather, it reflects the 'heterogeneity of the post-modern, [post-colonial] condition' and feminist epistemology. It seeks to broaden the modes of knowledge production, systems and scope of knowledge beyond the traditional hegemonic Western approaches to include non-dominant and hitherto marginalized epistemologies and knowledge systems (Brockelman, 2001: 10–11). In addition, the multiplicity of understandings generated is often constructed through the particularized idiosyncratic lenses of the viewer/reader and based on her/his social location. Most importantly, it demonstrates how conventional systems of knowledge and modes of communication/representation are culturally constructed, albeit from the hegemonic Western culture and values, and how this in turn shapes meanings communicated (Eisner, 1997: 7).

The potential of arts-based research to destabilize hegemonic systems, processes, and worldviews offers an opportunity to create a post-colonial and critical lens through which we may view and validate non-Western and non-dominant cultures and epistemologies. This critical approach to scholarship aims at promoting action and social change in non-patronizing ways by destabilizing Eurocentric values, conventions and knowledge systems while broadening the scope of what constitutes legitimate systems and forms of knowledge (Harding, 1996: 22). The use of visual images to depict marginality or life on the margins puts the marginalized in direct contact with the audiences/readers. It also gives an air of immediacy to the issues at hand as opposed to textual descriptions of marginality that risk distancing viewers/readers from the issues and thereby failing to engender empathy for the marginalized (Eisner: 1997: 8). Through those images, the marginalized can communicate with the audience/readers in their own voice. The direct communication may be in addition to or sometimes instead of interpretations provided through the use of text from the particular subject position of the author(s). Viewers have the opportunity to form their own impressions about the

conditions of the marginalized subjects of the images. Openness to different interpretations of visual images of marginality and suffering can offer fresh insights for both the author(s) and audiences/readers while challenging traditional notions/perceptions of the other.

The use of visual images and the resulting multiplicity of understandings generated by such images have a liberatory potential and hence form a useful post-colonial and feminist strategy (Vaughan, 2005: 6). In this regard, the researcher takes on the role of an activist challenging the status quo, and advocating alternative and equally legitimate forms of representation and modes of generating knowledge, and at the same time infusing that challenge with a social justice message. The choice of the scrapbook method would be consistent with the feminist resistance at the core of our individual research projects. The process of creating the images and reflecting on the experience would give us the opportunity to draw linkages between and amongst our research interests, and to piece together the underlying theme of life on the margins. Through the process, the synergies in our work have become more obvious as we have created the visual images and realized the common threads connecting our respective projects. There were common depictions from the body sculptures we created – this came out both in our practice sessions and at our presentation at Harrison Hot Springs. The scrapbook method might work to provide a scaffold for thinking about that process, those connections, and insights.



"Creative work requires a
trust in oneself that is
virtually impossible to
sustain alone"

UVic Feminist CLSA Panel Meeting

Minutes: 10 December 2004

Present: Hester, Elizabeth, Rebecca, Gillian **Regrets:** Maureen, Margot, Angela, Maneesha

Intro

The goal: talk about doing a joint presentation at the annual meeting of the Canadian Law and Society Association (CLSA). The Conference will be held in Harrison Hot Springs, B.C. in June 2005, and will in part honour John McLaren who is retiring in December 2005.¹

The Idea

We started with a general consensus, big-eyed enthusiasm and brief brainstorm of the idea – that we coordinate participation at the CLSA as a critical mass of U. Vic Law feminists. We talked about organizing a panel with perhaps eight participants that would enable us to engage with each other's work, make connections to strategies that we are employing around related themes (rights discourse, neoliberalism, critical pedagogy), celebrate our numbers, and think creatively about challenging the presentation's form.

Our Projects

Gillian, Elizabeth, Hester and Rebecca each spent a few minutes talking about current projects and thinking about the ways in which our projects connect and interconnect, and teasing out the themes in our work. Gillian talked about her focus on Quebec's division of powers challenge to federal provisions in employment insurance legislation regarding maternity and parental leave. Elizabeth is starting to think about choice and autonomy in the context of the unplanned pregnancies resulting from medical negligence cases. Hester is currently pulling together thoughts on equality rights and family which draw on recent *Charter* cases. Rebecca is engaged in two projects. One looks at themes of space, citizenship and breastfeeding mothers. Her other project is about dissent.

Title/Overarching Theme: Borders, Boundaries and Bodies

From our discussion of our projects, our colleagues' projects, and the connections, we began to find some commonalities between our projects that would enable us to do a manageable presentation with such a large group of participants. Themes began to emerge: 'borders, boundaries and bodies' – 'choice and autonomy' – 'critical analysis of legal rights discourses' – each of which provide a possible bridge between our various projects.

Forms of Engagement

There was also some discussion at this meeting about how a creative approach to presentation, particularly one that could tie in to feminist and critical pedagogical practices, might be a good means to help us negotiate the large numbers of presenters, as well as reflect the essence of the connections in our work.

Next Steps

Hester is going to check out the length allocated to panels and whether there is any latitude for slightly longer slots. Next meeting: 28 January 2005 at 11:00 a.m. to assess where we are in our projects and to put together a panel proposal.

Memo

| | |
|----------|---------------------------------------|
| To: | Postcard Collective |
| From: | Maureen |
| Subject: | Collaboration as Feminist Methodology |

Collaboration has been an essential feminist methodology for our presentation and scrapbook. Vera John-Steiner (2000) accurately portrays the need for collaboration in any academic work which takes risks and moves away from dominant discourse, culture and practices, ‘creative work requires a trust in oneself that is virtually impossible to sustain alone’ (p. 8).

Feminist legal research historically attempted to unpack the gendered inequalities of the legal system and in a positivist way detail how those gender inequalities could be ameliorated and/or eliminated. To do so usually entailed identifying the differential impact of laws and the legal system on men and women and exposing the law’s disregard, or at best ignorance, of the lived experience of women’s lives. Usually this research was done on an individual basis (following the male dominant mode of legal research) and in compliance with academic institutional male norms of according privilege to single authored, or primary authored, work in the tenure and promotion race.

However, feminist scholarship has increasingly been drawn towards collaborative research. Indeed the two are often intertwined:

The link between collaborative inquiry and feminist theory would seem an obvious one. Both call attention to a number of common concerns, which can be grouped under such rubrics as ‘interrelatedness’ and ‘dialogic openness.’ Both embody a number of common issues, including the role of authority and agency, respectively, in professional interaction. (Burnett and Ewald, 1994)

Feminist theory is also based on relationship and acknowledgement of different ways of knowing and learning. Relationship is the means by which feminists understand self and attempt to see the other through mutual learning and interdependence. As such, collaborative research attempts to be reflective, representative and to give voice and space to all in the collaboration while being attentive to power and cultural imbalances among those forming the group. And these were the practices we set out to explore in our collaborative presentation/performance and in the creation of this scrapbook.

Hey!

Margot and I are in Seattle at the Cascadian Feminist gathering. We were just talking about the letter that was sent to Stephen Harper, leader of the opposition, circulated by email and signed by 131 law profs. We were just tuning and ranting about the kind of issue that could garner that support and whether it was tied to the formal equality aspects of the same-sex marriage debate. Why didn't 131 law professors rise up in response to the SCC decision in Gosselin for example? What kind of feminist issue could get that kind of support? What kind of letter could we write that might get profs across the country to sign on? Might be something to talk about for our CLSA panel...

Love, E & M.



Postcard Collective

c/o University of Victoria

Faculty of Law

P.O. Box 2400, STN CSC

Victoria, B.C.

V8W 3H7

CANADA

UVic Feminist CLSA Panel Meeting

Minutes: 28 January 2005

Present: Elizabeth, Gillian, Hester, Maneesha, Margot (phone), Rebecca

Regrets: Angela, Maureen

The Idea

We started the meeting by talking about the open letter to Stephen Harper,² the reasons why some of us had or hadn't signed it, and our feelings of sorrow and anger that cases like *Gosselin*³ did not seem to generate an equivalent outpouring of academic activism. Would this not be an interesting way to start our panel – ask those very questions: What kind of letter could we write? What would a feminist petition to Harper look like? What kind of support would it generate? – and then use our presentation to think about the connections between our work through this device? Our presentation could then probe the interconnections in our work with the ultimate goal of producing a text and asking the participants at our workshop – or maybe even at the conference to sign on. The discussion then took off – giving a small glimpse into what a panel discussion might in fact look like, probing some of our concerns about the original letter, and exploring the question of what a letter from us might say. As a mechanism, it looked like the idea of the letter might work.

Drafting an Abstract

In a playful search for a title to our presentation – using movie metaphors and other plays on words with the theme of the Conference 'Law's Empire' – the collective began to muse about sending a postcard to the participants of the conference – A Postcard from the Edge (of Empire) – asking them to join us in our conversation, to help us with both the text and the context of our letter. If our letter ultimately is a postcard, as opposed to a letter, then there might be scope for all kinds of engagement and analysis.

Next Steps

To communicate by e-mail and collectively draft the initial 'postcard' to serve as both frame-work for our discussion and panel proposal. Margot to do some research on postcards and report back. Next meeting to be determined.

Memo

| | |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| To: | Postcard Collective |
| From: | Margot |
| Subject: | Picture Postcards and Empire |
| <p>This postcard stuff is richer than we thought! The social history of the postcard, at least as it relates to the British Empire, is fascinating and relevant. The Paris Exhibition of 1889 lays claim to the first picture postcards (Staff, 1966; Wollaeger, 2001) and, by 1915, ‘a craze for picture postcards had made [postcards] a prominent feature of the British Empire’ (Wollaeger, 2001: 44). The popularity and scale of postcard sending were huge, a popularity linked to changes in the British postal service that permitted the standard-sized card to circulate easily (Wollaeger, 2001: 45). From 1903 to 1910, one to three million postcards were sent through the British postal service. By 1914, the number was 880 million (Holt and Holt, 1988: 43). It was, however, a short run. The end of the First World War brought a doubling of postage rates, and the tremendous cultural visibility of the postcard in England diminished (Wollaeger, 2001: 45).</p> <p>Almost every aspect of life appeared on the cover of the picture postcard during the height of the craze (Fraser, 1980: 39). There was an ‘astonishing range’ of cards, including topical postcards reflecting debates over current contentious issues like suffrage, tariff rates, and imperial policy, situating the postcard, thus, as ‘a new agent of propaganda’ (Wollaeger, 2001: 45). Many postcards borrowed heavily from and, in turn, reinforced colonial stereotyping by representing ‘primitivist images of indigenous peoples during the most jingoistic period of England’s global dominance’ (Wollaeger, 2001: 44). Even domestic postcards often relied upon these sorts of images of native others, images complicit in the advance of empire and the ‘norms of gender, sex, and race that empire underwrites’ (Wollaeger, 2001: 44).</p> <p>This history of postcards stars women. For contemporary observers of this postcard craze, women, in particular, featured as ‘both victims and carriers of a new cultural disease’</p> | |

(Wollaeger, 2001: 46). That is, women predominantly sent, received and collected postcards. Postcards facilitated the generation of community, specifically women's community, and, thus, one commentator argues, 'in some small way . . . played a part in the long process of [women's] emancipation' (Phillips, 2000: 18). But colonial postcards were also notable for their 'insistent framing and arranging of the female body' (Phillips, 2000: 18). Images of indigenous women in postcards of the early 20th century cast these women in terms that reflected and reinforced normative sex and race stereotypes through such things as satire, romanticization, and appropriation (Wollaeger, 2001: 58–9).

Thus the postcard image for our work is a serendipitous choice. We are all women perched geographically on the edge of the North American continent, of the Canadian scholarly community. We study different dynamics of oppressions, or marginalization, and we all have collective and individual histories of differing degrees of marginalization, mediated by class, race, immigrant status, and sexuality. Postcards typically, and historically, trade on the notion of 'away' or of the margin – they are self-conscious communications from the edge to the centre or 'home'.

Second, the format of a postcard is less prepossessing than, say, an epistolary essay or some longer text: the shorthand and informality of its message convey, arguably, less lofty a sense of purpose. As Moran (2005) notes, the message permitted by the postcard is a 'social leveler' (p. 18). Prior to the appearance of the postcards, the writing of letters was, in England, governed by a net of strict rules about how to open and sign off a letter, structured by the sender's social status and relation to the recipient. Short letters were rude, because the addressee often had to pay the postage costs; postcards, on the other hand, demand quick messages and have no space for elaborate salutations or leave takings. They are, Moran argues, 'non-elitist, informal and laid back. . . .' (p. 18). Another academic states that, 'the picture postcard was possibly the greatest vehicle for messages of the new urban proletariat between 1900 and 1914' (Fraser, 1980: 39). One might add, they are ill-suited for footnotes, elaborate argumentation, and well-expounded theorizing – a tension obviously within this piece of work.

The primacy of the image in a postcard fits our project well. Our communication was mostly visual, although not totally such. Like a postcard, the image functions as the central or core impact of the missive (Kelly, 2004: 101). Indeed, early postcards, at least in England, had no specific place for a message. By directive of the Postmaster General, these postcards had an address-only directive on the stamped side. Any message had to be written over the image on the reverse side (Kelly, 2004: 101)! Our own message will stand in a complicated way to the picture, as is true of many other postcards. For instance, a historic cataloguing of postcards shows the often bizarre interpolation of the senders' own anxieties or preoccupations into larger, political events: on a 1911 card showing a condemned man in an electric chair, a sender writes, 'I have been gardening all this week' (Moran, 2005: 18).

A postcard signifies both movement and preservation of borders. The enforcement of empire relied upon the imposition of geo-political borders. The appropriation of the exotic within those borders, manifest in the images and locales from which postcards were sent, was further reinforcement of the border between home and away. Yet, postcards also transgress borders by the movement they represent and capture – the traveller sends postcards from places other than home, and these messages attest to mobility.

Postcards too confound the public/private distinction. The text and image of a postcard, while between private parties, are necessarily as well a public text. It is an open letter, like the Harper letter, that has a specific destiny, a distinct named addressee. Yet, the postcard, as it traverses the postal system, has an 'ungovernable' fate: it can be intercepted and read by a wide unintended audience and its message will not always be intelligible to that audience. The postcard's picture face encourages public display, and motivates ongoing public perusal of the private text.

Moreover, postcards also featured, in their role as devices of propaganda, as widely circulating social protest or commentary, often tied into competing patriotisms of late 19th- and early 20th-century European nation-states. So, for example, a great collection of postcards was produced by German postcard publishers (and also by Italian and Belgian publishers) in several languages about the second trial of Captain Dreyfus in 1899 France; similar postcard campaigns were part of an anti-British campaign around the South African War (Fraser, 1980: 40). And, as already mentioned, in Britain itself political propaganda was also part of the range of uses to which the postcard was put: postcards were used by the Conservative Party in the general election campaign of January 1920. As well, the struggle over women's suffrage saw postcards published by both sides of the debate (Fraser, 1980: 40).

The use of the device of the postcard is also troubling. As the historical account notes, postcards are intimately connected with colonizing practices of the 19th and 20th centuries. So too, our own claim of marginalization is troubling and potentially colonizing. We use the postcard to represent different dimensions of oppression that some but not all of us have actually experienced. In this sense, we also are tourists, sending back home representations in which we attempt to merge with the 'space of the exotic' – we appropriate the colonized or marginalized by returning the image to the 'metropole' (Wollaeger, 2001: 47).

Susan Stewart has written that the appeal of the postcard derives from 'the sense of authenticity attached to location' (Wollaeger, 2001: 47). Of course, in many cases, it is a false sense of authenticity: the images of postcards, particularly those of people, are frequently staged (as our images will be), and sometimes insincere in their appeal to some reality 'out there'. In this way, postcards during the height of the British Empire participated in the 'sense of subject formation marked by empire', as a 'restaging' of 'the precarious dynamics of colonial exchange' (Wollaeger, 2001: 47).

So, we would be well advised to proceed with the postcard form with both glee (because of the resonances with social history of women) and caution (because of the overlays of colonial imposition and imagery.)

UVic Feminist CLSA Panel Meeting

Minutes: 30 March 2005

Present: Elizabeth, Gillian, Hester, Maneesha, Margot (phone), Rebecca, Maureen

Regrets: Angela

Discussing our Panel

We reviewed and discussed the postcard, then began the task of discussing what our workshop would substantively look like. We began to act out the conversation that we envisioned might in fact take place during the workshop. We also began to explore some of our unease about the kind of project we were envisioning. How were we planning to engage the audience? What kind of text could we generate in the time that we had? Were we replicating some of the assumptions about professional authority that had troubled us in the signing of the original letter? How was our presentation going to challenge those norms? Why did we not just send a postcard with a one-liner on the back – having a great time, wish you were here?

Discussing the Idea of Postcards

Our initially flippant use of the postcard metaphor, intriguingly, was what eventually enabled us to move forward. In discussing the various elements of what made a postcard different from a letter, the uniqueness of our medium began to emerge.⁴ Postcards were often sent from faraway places, from 'the colonies'. Postcards were public, anyone could read them. Postcards were often othering of the women they portrayed. Postcards were usually a one-way conversation. Postcards required us to be succinct. But most tellingly, postcards had images as well as text. How could we convey this aspect of our postcard?

Body Workshops

Hester and Maureen talked to us about their experiences at a body sculpture workshop in mid-March. The workshop had been run by Lina de Guevara, a woman trained in theatre of the oppressed.⁵ One component of the workshop had been the creation of tableaux, visual images using the bodies of other participants as sculptural material in order to convey what they would otherwise use words to convey. Perhaps if we engaged in this same kind of movement exercise as a group we would be able to figure out the ways in which our work was connected to the postcard images we were thinking through. Perhaps we would be able to engage our audience in a similar exercise? Maybe a workshop of this nature would allow us to work with the substantive injustices we were theorizing in a visual manner?

Next Steps

See if we can book Lina de Guevara to do a workshop with us as a group. Check with Dean's office to see if we can deduct the cost from our Professional Development accounts. Send our postcard to the Conference Organizers.

Dear Harrison Hot Springs Participants: Having a great time – wish you were here.

We are eight feminists living and working on the edge of empire (the west coast of Canada). Bouyed by our pedagogical interconnections we have come together to draft a petition to our Prime Minister and we want your support. In the letter, we plan to articulate our deep concerns regarding issues of women's personhood and status in Canada. Our concerns are diverse:

Elizabeth Adlin-Tettey is concerned about the law's unwillingness to respect and value women's choices and autonomy regarding reproduction by failing to recognize involuntary parenthood as a compensable loss. **Gillian Calder** is exploring the implications for women's care-giving and reproductive citizenship of recent challenges to programs of universal benefit provision.

Angela Cameron's work is examining how neo-liberal approaches to governance have influenced the ways that restorative justice is practiced in cases of intimate violence against women, with particular attention to alternative measures legislation.

Manesha Deckha queries the ability of women (and men) to choose a body in pain by engaging in consensual, yet painful, practices such as S&M. She wonders if the insights of transnational and postcolonial feminist theories on how to imagine sub-cultural practices might recuperate the stalemate in this latest area of feminist 'sex wars' and escape its choice/false consciousness divide.

Rebecca Johnson is concerned with the exclusion of nursing mothers from public space.

Hester Lessard is working to locate the recent spate of equality cases within larger neo-liberal trends. Her key preoccupation is with the extent to which equality rights reflect, facilitate or challenge the neo-liberal priorities and values that have now moved to the center of the policy agenda.

Maureen Maloney's interest is in the practices of Restorative Justice within First Nations communities and the increasing and expanding use of these systems of dispute resolution for incidents of violence against women in relationships (and in rare cases sexual assault) and the implications of these emerging (and/or traditional) systems for women and First Nations Culture.

Margot Young worries that recent developments in both judicial and political spheres track neo-liberalism's disregard for women's economic and social equality.

We have encountered significant difficulties in drafting our letter. For example, some of us take as our primary focus the identity-constituting and identity-constraining dimensions of legal discourses. Others take as our starting point the material and ideological factors which shape and limit attempts to engage in law for the purpose of challenging substantive injustices. As well, our own experiences and social locations simultaneously enrich and limit our understandings of injustice. It is challenging to articulate a common ground without erasing important differences. We feel that such difficulties may be inherent in projects/positions which are located at the margins. Hence, our positioning, literally at the edge of the continent, presents itself as an accidental but fortuitous metaphor for the politics at the edge of empire. It would be great to have your help, with both the text and the context. We invite you to join our collective conversation – as we work to draft a postcard from the edge. See you soon!

**C.L.S.A. Participants 2005
“Law’s Empire”
Harrison Hot Springs, B.C.
V0A 1G0**



Memo

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| To: | Postcard Collective |
| From: | Maureen |
| Subject: | Theatre of the Oppressed and Tableau Drama |

Augusto Boal, a Brazilian playwright and actor, devised Theatre of the Oppressed in 1971 as a means of representing the oppression of, and reaching out to, those people marginalized by and from society and community. His intention of creating Theatre of the Oppressed was, in his own words, to develop 'in the oppressed citizens, the language of the theatre, which is the essential human language. This form of theatre is meant to be practiced *by, about and for* the oppressed, to help them fight against their oppressions and to transform the society that engenders those oppressions. The word Oppressed is used in the sense of s/he who has lost the right to express his/her wills and needs, and is reduced to the condition of obedient listener of a monologue. Theatre of the Oppressed must be used as a tool of fighting against all forms of class oppression, racism, sexism, and all kinds of discrimination. It does not aim to be only like *Hamlet's* definition – *a mirror that allows us to see our vices and virtues* – but to be an instrument of concrete social transformation' (Boal, 2004).

Theatre of the Oppressed refers to a play or drama in which the actors represent a scene from an aspect of life (home, family, work, social) which depicts one or more individuals oppressing another individual or group who do not know how to resist the oppression. The audience watches the pre-scripted drama unfold and as they do so, any member of the audience may enter into the play and replace an individual who is being oppressed to illustrate how they might deal with the oppressive behaviour. Audience intervention may happen many times during the course of the performance. In this way the audience and actors will discover collaboratively many voices and ideas of how to resist oppression.

As one of the striking commonalities of our disparate legal feminist academic work was the focus on women's oppression by societal (con)structures often either supported or ignored by law, we considered the potential of using Theatre of the Oppressed to represent these oppressions. One way of illustrating the themes and commonalities of our academic work to an audience might be achieved by presenting our themes by one or more plays representing women's oppression and requesting the audience to participate with us in devising strategies to resist the oppressors. Theatre would also be visual and risky; connecting with our themes of postcards and representation by art and coming from the edge.

During the discussion of Theatre of the Oppressed, another possibility, also drawn from the work of Augusto Boal emerged: Image Theatre or Tableau Drama. Creating and using embodied images seemed to better reflect the aesthetic of the theme of postcards as static depictions. Two of our group (Hester and I) had attended a Theatre of the Oppressed workshop put on by a drama educator, Lina de Guevera who had utilized Tableau Drama as a means of helping elicit our emotions around certain areas of discussion. This form of image work consists of an individual or group using bodies to

form and depict a narrative, event or idea in a freeze frame, a human statue. This may be done individually by one person having a single vision and using other bodies to create the frieze or collaboratively by onlookers seriatim adding their bodies to the tableau to insert what they perceive to be missing. Tableau Drama would both ground and illustrate the inter-connectedness of the themes of our academic work and visually depict them in static pictorial fashion mirroring the postcard image. Tableaux are most commonly understood as: ‘literary representations . . . focusing on what is unique in the situation. The elements of the motif are composed in a scenic arrangement in a stylized set up. The characters are grouped in particular relation to each other, expressing a certain atmosphere or attitude, often aiming at elevated gravity. In drama, tableaux most often occur as opening or closing scenes. The movements of the characters may be “frozen” in a fixed position, often with a symbolic base, or the characters may freeze, “holding poses with high pathos”’ (Larsen, 2006, footnotes omitted).

In addition to providing the visual element for our postcard metaphor, tableaux require a different interaction by the onlookers, eliciting emotional as well as intellectual engagement with the piece. As Boal’s work tells us, ‘the image work never remains static – as with all of Theatre of the Oppressed, the frozen image is simply the starting point for or prelude to the action, which is revealed in . . . the bringing to life of the images’ (Boal, 2002: xxii). Audience members are presented with a representation composed of bodies and see the tableaux in a multiplicity of ways depending upon their position and station, both figuratively and literally, within it. Moreover the onlooker is encouraged to view the tableaux from different perspectives and angles and to enter the piece as other and outsider requiring simultaneous physical, emotional and intellectual engagement.

Tableau Drama and Image Theatre has a strong focus and, if done well, conveys a strong theme. It also requires the participation of the onlooker in making sense of it through their own eyes and lived experiences. In our project, Tableau Drama might allow us to explore the diverse ways of understanding identity, difference and oppression both in the roles of oppressor and oppressed.

Interestingly the dialogic discourse of feminist theory and research which is often utilized in feminist collaboration to give voice to the underprivileged and marginalized will be, in our project, literally and figuratively muted to give space to visual expression. In doing so, we hope to better represent the lived experience of women who are marginalized by society and ignored for the most part by law: a symbolic rendering of silenced voices.



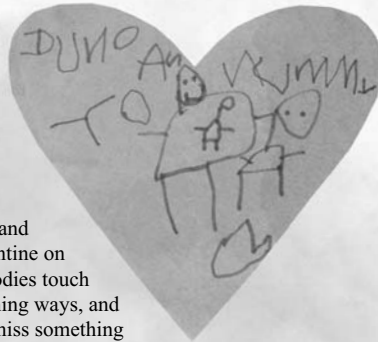
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Journal Entry on Touching (Rebecca)

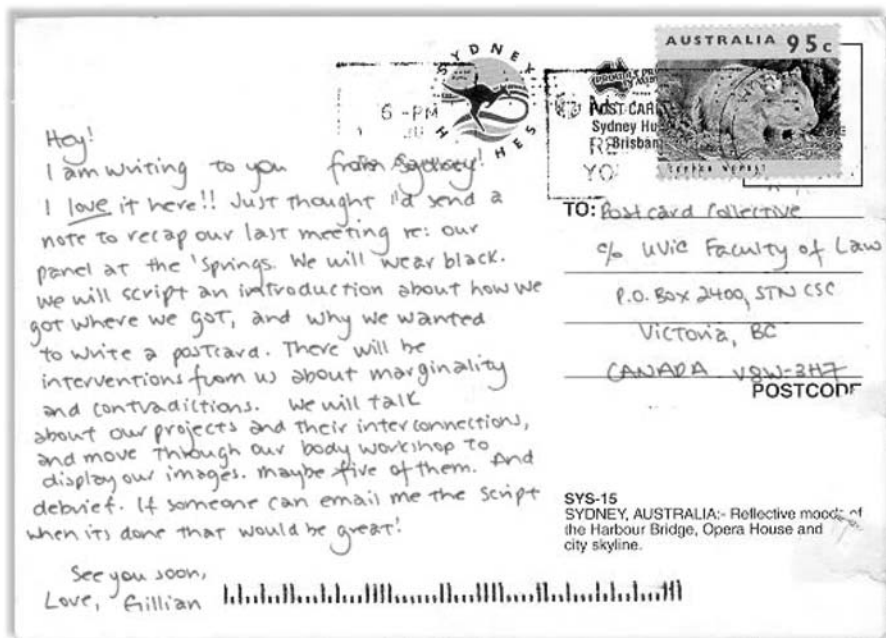
Dear journal,

Duncan, my four-year-old, comes home with two pieces of paper. One is a note reminding the parents that for the next few weeks, the children will be doing a series of classes at daycare called, 'Let's Talk About Touching'. He also comes home with a Valentine's card. It looks like a picture of him standing on a table. No, he tells me, it is a picture of me holding hands with his older brother Alex, and of Duncan inside my belly. I hang the Valentine on the fridge. The drawing reminds me that bodies touch in all sorts of complicated boundary breaching ways, and that even pictures about bodies in contact miss something about the visceral experience of bodies actually in contact.

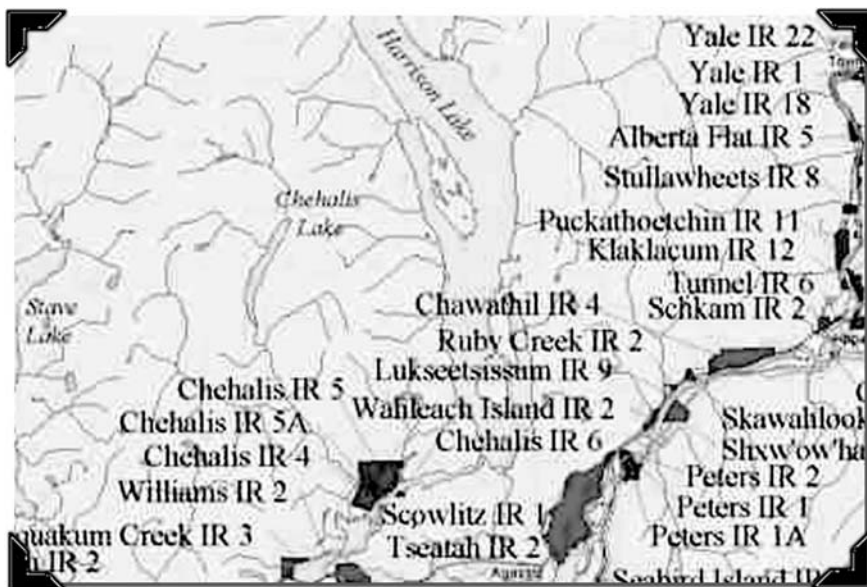
Certainly, the hands-on-experience of touch that is so much a part of child-raising does *not* generally extend to my life in academe. I must admit that I find it vastly more comfortable to 'talk about touching' than to engage in actual touching itself.



It is easy to sit in a room with friends and talk with passion about the importance of embodiment, and the need to subvert mind/body dualisms. It is quite a different thing to spend two hours in a room, being asked to put our bodies into play, our bodies into contact. Lina gives us a series of exercises, designed to ease us into the body tableau work. In spite of the fact that these women are my trusted friends, I feel self-conscious, awkward, uncomfortable. I feel a gap between brain and body signals. My brain is simply unable to 'think' my body out its sense of reluctance and risk. But I stay with the exercises, and as I do, the touching begins to feel less fraught. I begin to see and feel some things differently; the touching teaches me things that the talking does not. This seems to be the case for the other women as well. Though we eight have well-established relations of trust, we all need time before we can move beyond talking about touching to touching itself. The time required before the body is ready makes it clear to all of us we cannot proceed with our plan to include the audience in the process of tableau building. Trust and comfort take time. We may be able to experiment with our bodies in tableau, but, at the end of the day, it will still be necessary for us to find a vocabulary for talking about touching.

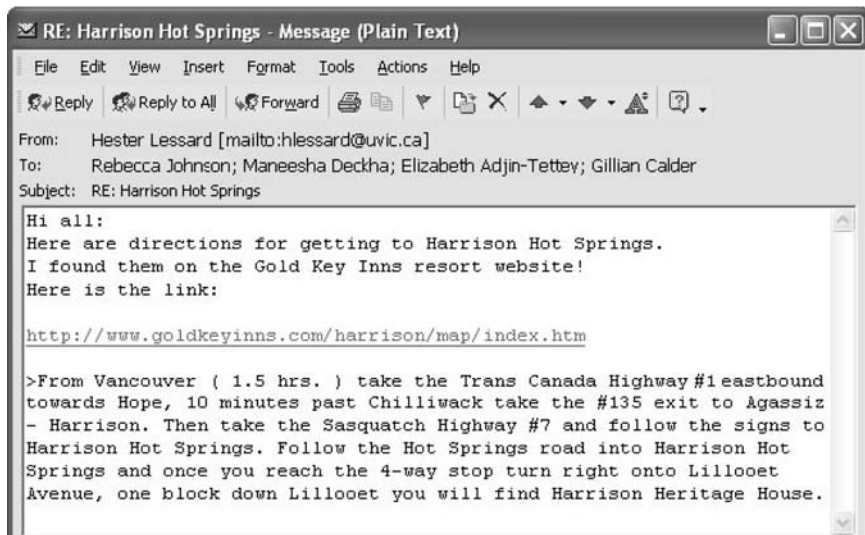


PART II: THE PERFORMANCE



Sto:lo Nation Traditional Territory

Map accessed at <http://www.stolonation.bc.ca/Miramar/Nation/snTerritory.htm>



Journal Entry on Setting up the Performance (Hester)

Dear journal,

The scholars who come to the annual meetings of the CLSA challenge academic conventions that hive off disciplinary areas into sealed compartments, and in turn, hive off the academy from 'the political intercourse of a given society and culture' (Said, 1996: 224). The autonomy of both law and the university from society and politics has deep ideological roots in liberal conceptions of public and private, state and society. Thus, CLSA's insistence on interdisciplinarity has an overtly political edge. In that spirit of political critique, the Postcards Collective aspired to illuminate the linkages, not only between law and abstract notions of 'the social', but between law and an insistently embodied conception of the social. As Patricia Williams (1996) observes, academic and educational practices often 'reenact and reinforce a power dynamic in which some people get to *imagine* oppression, and others spend their lives having their bodies put through its most grotesque motions' (p. 72). The plan to insert our relatively privileged bodies into the discursive space of an academic conference would by no means rupture the structured divorce between knowledge production and politics (Smith, 1999: Chapter 2). However, by foregrounding our bodies rather than texts, we hoped to render more visible the embodied dimension of knowledge and, more specifically, of academic practices. We live in our bodies and know from there; our bodies are always 'somewhere' (Campbell, 1998: 58–9). We hoped, for the two-hour duration of our presentation, to more clearly centre the 'somewhere'.

However, first we needed to engage with the 'somewhere' of an academic conference. Despite the presence of academics 'live' and 'in person', conferences in our area of study are centred around texts. Rooms are configured for the delivery of papers and both presenters and audience members engage in a ritualized performance that is continuous over time and repetitive, and that is part of a constellation of regulatory practices that produce the 'academic' as a subject position with a particular set of attributes (Butler, 1990: 16–25). Although it is an embodied and often unpredictable engagement, the conference presentation reifies 'an epistemological ordering that places the mental over the material' and reflects the Cartesian desire for 'bodily absence' that pervades academic practices and conventions (Warren, 2005: 89, 92). As others have observed, the absent body is a metaphor for whiteness and purity which figures racialized bodies and bodies that can less easily evade detection as contaminants and as continually and incessantly marked as different (Butler, 1990: 16–25; Warren, 2005: 89, 92). Dismantling physical spaces organized to foreground panels of 'talking heads' and placing our bodies rather than a text at the centre of our performance posed a threat to everyone's invisibility, including that of the audience members. It also sharply illuminated wide disparities in danger within the notionally 'safe' space of the exchange of ideas within the academy. Anxiety about embarrassing ourselves and our colleagues – a familiar part of any academic conference experience – fused with this more fundamental terror of exposure and visibility as intruders within the academy. The latter threat operated unevenly within our small collective of differently differentiated bodies. Indeed, it became immediately evident that those of us who were white and straight and tenured and, to a lesser degree, tenure tracked would, despite the removal of furniture and words, be able to 'hide' more effectively. The understanding that ours was a 'collective' performance to some extent denied or obscured these complex interrelationships of power and danger. Thus it was with some trepidation that we met to rehearse and reorganize the room. We shunted tables against walls to allow the audience to freely move from their seats and walk around our tableaux; we located ourselves in front of a mirrored wall that reflected the audience back at themselves; and we arranged seating that was multi-leveled – stools, armchairs, low tables – for ourselves during the loosely scripted conversation that made up the first part of our presentation.

CLSA Panel**Draft Script: Introduction****22 May 2005*****Postcard from the Edge (of Empire)******Script******Stage Left. We are all seated in a semi-circle. Dress: In black.*****1. Introductory conversation (2–5 minutes)**

Start with a discussion about the petition to Stephen Harper. Key points:

- a. The exclusive nature of the letter – law professors created the letter and only law professors, and in particular, those who teach constitutional law received letter.
- b. The discomfort with the assumption that law professors are authoritative re a complex social and political issue because of their special expertise.
- c. The importance nevertheless of signing the letter, making a statement, in context of surrounding politics re same sex marriage and gays and lesbians . . .

2. Segue into segment on 'Why/how write a feminist letter to Canadian governments' (2–5 minutes)

Ask whether we could write a letter that could convey the complexity we impart to equality and politics? Main points are:

- a. Feminist letter would come from margins.
- b. Feminist letter would be animated by substantive rather than formal concepts of equality and justice.
- c. Difficulty would be capturing the complexity and contradictions of positions at margins (edge of Empire) while at same time sending a strong message to the government.

3. Segue into segment on how our respective projects do and don't connect (15 minutes; we each get two minutes max!)

We will use the handout for this segment, drawing attention of audience to the blurbs from the conference program about our work and elaborating on the (dis)connections.

4. Segue into segment on why we should use images/bodies/theatre rather than a letter to communicate our message (8 minutes; 2 minutes each max!)

A focus on the body is important to our message. Main points here:

- a. History of using Theatre of Oppressed in education and in making an effective political statement.
- b. Describe our various experiences with image theatre workshops.

- c. Follow with piece on why we should think of our project as a postcard from the edge rather than a letter from the centre. Highlight the colonial dimensions/legacy of sending postcards and how our aim is to subvert that to the extent we can.
- d. Finally, explain to audience what we are going to do and what their role is.

5. The images: five images (1 hr: 15 minutes: 15 minutes for each image)

There will be one sculptor and one facilitator for each image.

As sculptors, we will use only our own bodies as material, not audience members. In general, we will use whatever props are around – chairs, lectern, sheath of papers, shoes, books, and bra. We will avoid gender signifiers that too rigidly script roles/causation.

After each image is finalized, the facilitator will invite the audience to leave their chairs, enter the space of the image and circulate through it to view the relationships from various angles and perspectives. After they resume their seats, the facilitator will encourage the audience to articulate concepts (one word, short phrases) evoked by the sculpture, and will write them down on the flip chart. The facilitator will then ask the audience to give the work a 'title'. The sculptor can participate at this point by explaining what her provisional title was and how it changed. As each image concludes, the page(s) with the concepts and titles will be taped to wall so that people can walk around afterwards and look at them.

6. The debrief (7 minutes or remaining time)

A couple of us will start it off with our observations about participating in the exercise, focusing on the process and methodology of how this collaborative and embodied work came to fruition. The discussion will enlarge with audience feedback on the entire experience and its relationship to empire, community, research and pedagogy.



For a slideshow of images, go to:
<http://www.law.uvic.ca/gcalder/postcards/images>

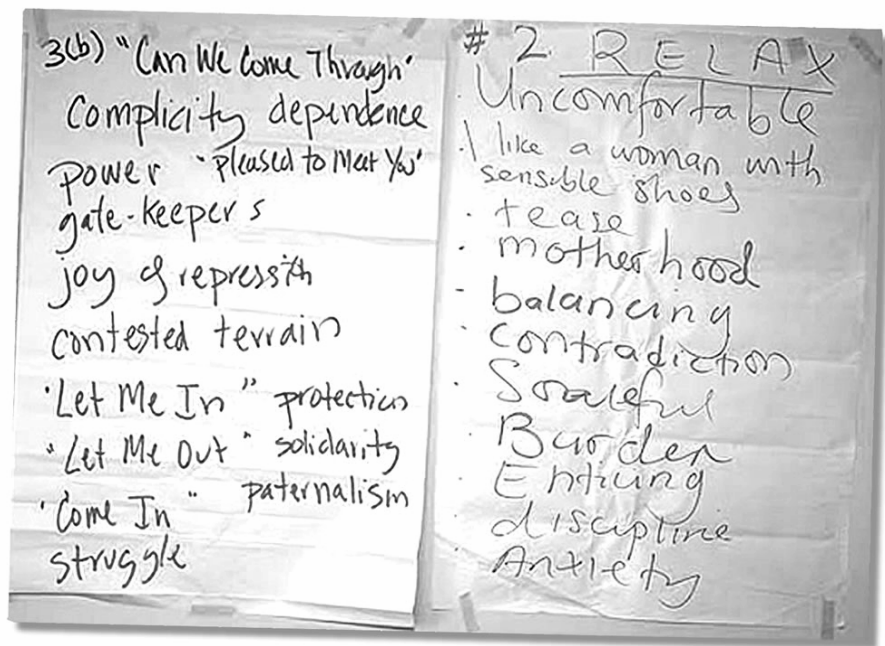
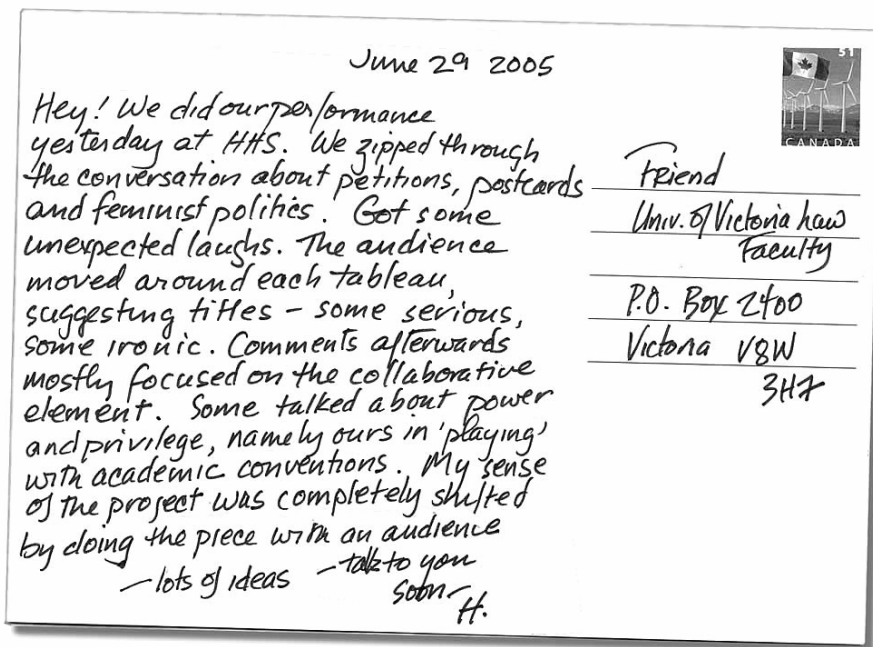


Photo by Holly Pattison



PART III: REFLECTING BACKJournal Entry on Internal/External Issues and Power/Privilege (Angela)

Dear journal,

Trauma and Oppression can multiply only in silence and concealment.
(Diamond, 1998: 388)

This exercise in embodiment has challenged us to ask ourselves some important questions about the politics and ethics of representation, privilege and oppression. In particular this reflection will explore internal and external issues (to the performance group) about power and privilege. Although there are complexities to be explored regarding privilege particularly, in the final analysis, I think that by pressing *our* female bodies physically into the service of anti-subordination, we *have* made some gesture against the silencing and concealment of women's trauma.

Intersectional feminist theory points out that in order to be truly anti-subordinate we must attack both relationships of domination between groups at a macro level and '... look at the dominant and subordinate groupings or categories *within* those groups' (Anthias, 2002: 275). The postcards project was partly about investigating these categories through performance, and, in its aftermath, examining those same categories in relation to ourselves as performers and academics. How close are we to 'the edge' of Empire? Do our positions shift if we account for ourselves as a group, rather than as individuals? In claiming a position on the edge, what do we say about ourselves as feminists, as academics, and as women? Several answers present themselves that are in tension and sometimes in contradiction with one another.

As (some women of colour, some queer, some parenting, some older, some younger, some partnered, some single) feminists within the academy we are occupying a space close to the edge of (academic) Empire. In our daily academic lives, and in this particular performance, we push back on the boundaries of Empire as asserted by universities, law schools, colleagues, and students. We work hard to counteract the ways oppression manifests itself in our lives, and to carve out a safe space of anti-subordination and creativity on our terms.

This work can be difficult, and energy-consuming. Razack and Fellows (1998) remind us that, because we live within complex systems of oppression that position us as marginal because of our gender, sexual orientation, colour, ethnicity, disability or age, women are forced to limit the 'various ways [that] we know and feel about one another' (p. 335). We are forced to set our sights and energy instead on navigating the ground occupied by white, middle-class, heterosexual men. By bodily performing the oppressions we have learned about from our academic work (or perhaps experienced ourselves), we are pushing open the possibilities of how we can know and feel about one another. Not only in relation to the other performers physically present, but with the women whose experiences and lives we have learned about in our work. The experiences of physical contact, physical manipulation,

representation and visual reflexivity added dimensions to knowing and feeling about one another and oppression that went beyond written or spoken word, or viewing visual images such as photographs or film: 'Artful telling has a way of appealing against the horrific (and subtle) operation of oppression' (Diamond, 1998: 388). Working *in* our bodies was a wonderful, and unavoidable way to refocus our energies.

As a group of feminists working collaboratively on the performance intragroup differences were lessened, if not submerged, by our coalitional risk-taking, and our need for a united front. Even in representing our differences, we portray a united front at the level of both feminist consciousness and 'the physical': we were listed on the program together, stood in a line to speak, completed one another's ideas in a scripted conversation, stood in a group to sculpt, dressed alike. We were 'feminist women' for the purposes of the body sculpture workshop.

The flip side of this is, of course, that as relatively economically and socially privileged women we may be overestimating our insights, not only into the oppression of others, but into our own privilege. In relation to women outside of our performance group, we arguably shift into a different social space, further from the 'edge', than described above. Situated next to our feminist colleagues working for less money, with less power, and less recognition in other disciplines and spaces, we are closer to the heart of Empire. Our positions of relative privilege are marked not only by our economic and social advantages, but by our freedom to push back on the boundaries of Empire within our own discipline through unconventional conference presentations with limited fear of economic or career hardship. The process of embodiment begs the question of us: 'Where *is* your body?' (Matsuda, 1996); meaning not bodily *performance* of oppression, but our physical presence in poor neighbourhoods, women's anti-violence centres, rallies, protests, and other spaces of physical confrontation and gendered difficulty. This call to couple an embodied, physical fight against oppression with intellectual and academic activism is frequently heard from women activists on the 'front lines' (Lakeman, 2005; Rebick, 2005). Have we answered it?

Journal Entry on Essentialism (Maneesha)

Dear journal,

Our presentation at Harrison Hot Springs was a way for us to perform theoretical concepts regarding constructions and marginalizations of the body in law. We centred the body as a terrain for the intricate processes of thought, emotion, and interpretation in order to create, disrupt and communicate knowledge. Our performance imparted integrity to theoretical projects invested in undoing Cartesian binaries and the legal stigmatization of the body, and, in particular, certain bodies as legitimate sites of knowledge-making.

In this and other ways our performance may be seen as subversive. The nature of the impact on essentialism concerns, however, that have marked feminist conversations over the last few decades or so, is less certain. Briefly, these concerns have highlighted the ways in which feminist discourses have mimicked the very exclusionary practices feminists criticized in western humanist theories of freedom and justice and the partial ways in which they imagined the purportedly universal subject of liberal legalism. The collective force of such anti-essentialist critiques was to caution against elevating gender as a power determinant above and beyond all others, or even situating gender as a discrete axis of analysis. Instead, an intersectional approach is preferred, one that recognizes various social force fields interacting with one another to create any given situation (Spelman, 1988; Crenshaw, 1989; Howe, 1995; Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 1998; Razack, 1998). This type of anti-essentialist critique presents an important but formidable challenge to feminist organizing which creates women-only spaces even where the women in these spaces are deeply committed to the goals of anti-essentialism (as we were/are) (hooks, 1980).

Indeed, the collaboration we engaged in illuminates the thorny and unresolved questions raised by anti-essentialist critiques. In one sense, the performance emerges as the future of what anti-essentialist feminist praxis might look like. That is, we came together as a group of women to do something that related to all of our work. An entry, or even, eligibility, point for the performance was a shared gender which raises the fraught associations of essentialism that attach to such a positioning. Yet, apart from this unsaid criterion of membership in the collaboration, neither the process nor the substance privileged gender or any other social axis as a prime explanatory force. But the 'apart from this' qualification is a critical one. Put into tort(ious?) terms, but for our gender, none of us would have been included in the collective. Indeed, but for the importance given to gender, a history of feminist faculty staying in touch regularly through email listserve and socializing together once per term would not have enabled and preceded the effort to collaborate on this project. And although none of us appeared to hold on explicitly to the shared gender we all inhabited, neither did we expressly foreground the differences among us in terms of age, race, class, and/or sexual orientation.

Ours was not the type of project that demanded we navigate through these tensions. Rather, it was a project that, while permitting us to remain aware of the privileges each of us possesses, stressed a shared marginality of being on the edges of an academic empire. A logic of commonalities in our work grounded the project and gave voice to the narrative of a common claim to marginality tying differentiated bodies together. Of course, there is a place for this embodied telling. Even within the general arena of academia and the more specific site of our own law faculty, there is a need for speaking about the marginalization of women, including instructors, and the need for gender-specific spaces.⁶ Indeed, a particularly memorable audience comment that elicited affirmative nods from other female audience members during the post-performance discussion was how we, as a group of faculty women sitting/standing and working together, was the most striking image from the performance. One member was even heard to ask how she could get a job at UVic! Being a relatively new feminist faculty member, such comments resonate easily. Academic practices and especially the challenges of doing anti-oppressive pedagogy make gender-specific spaces within academia important. And so perhaps our collaboration can be seen as an example of what Gayatri Spivak calls 'strategic essentialism', where essentialism is permissible when it furthers a normatively disruptive end (Spivak and Rooney, 1994: 153; Kapur, 2001: 377–81). But by the same logic, there is a need for other specific spaces and it is this need and the differences among us that did not receive concerted emphasis despite our collective faith in anti-essentialist critiques. It seems then we are left with an understandable irony that marks the success of feminist initiatives at the same moment it notes their limits: a performance of embodiment that inclines toward commonalities rather than difference. That we, a group of women who embrace anti-essentialist critiques, ended up with this as one of the 'results' of our work is perhaps less a mark of 'failing' than a testament to the challenges and ongoing negotiation required of truly intersectional feminist work.

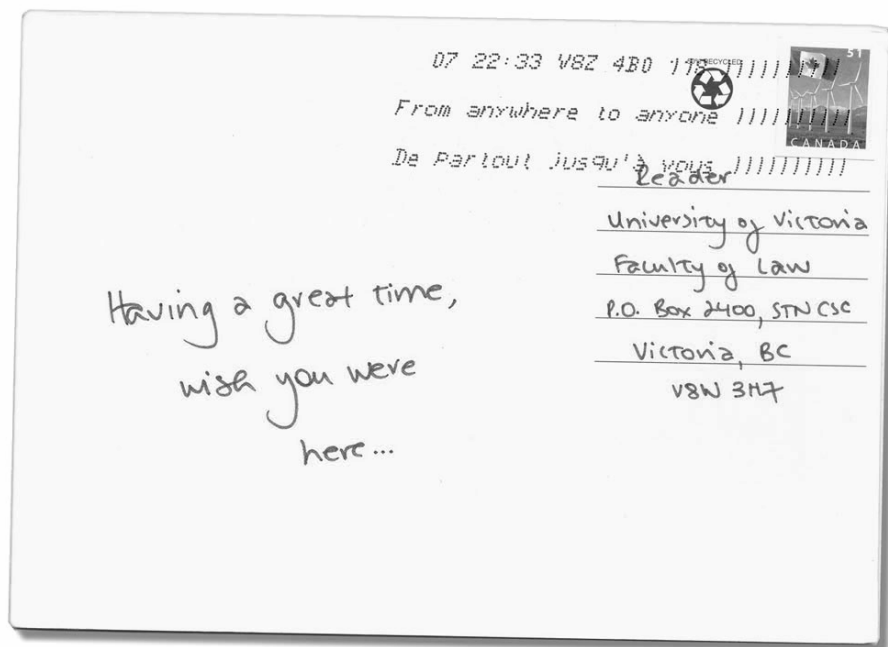
Concluding Journal Entry (Rebecca)

Dear journal,

It seems so very odd, and somehow, even unfair: coming up with a conclusion for this scrapbook is no easier than coming up with a conclusion for a journal article. Indeed, it feels even worse. I suppose we could just 'stop'. And yet, such an ending seems unsatisfying. On the one hand, there is the strong desire to 'wrap things up', 'tie the threads together', provide a summary of where we have been, place a frame of meaning around the fragments. On the other hand, any honest account of the voyage renders that desire for closure highly suspect. The experience we have scrapbooked here, far from leading us towards answers, pulled us in the direction of more questions. And yet, they were questions that we were able to ask *together*, in the context of one localized moment of collaborative feminist experimentation. In asking the questions together, we found ourselves journeying with each other in ways we would not have attempted individually, and able to see certain possibilities, dangers, and blind spots in our own work (and in our own lives). And perhaps we can assert that the journey produced some kind of 'we' that didn't exist in the same way before.

There is a risk of overplaying the hand. And it is not clear that the 'we' is exactly the point. Certainly, it would seem an exaggeration (even a moment of hubris) to assert that the process fundamentally changed us – left us otherwise than we once were. And yet, it would not be too much to assert that the experience made visible for us in a powerful way the ongoing processes through which we are, at every moment, embedded in and pulling on the multiple threads of experience that shape social and legal identity. It made it necessary to ask different questions about our implication in systems of exploitation and marginalization, to take embodiment seriously in grappling with the intersecting relations of gender, sexuality, race, class, and nation, made visible some of the complexities of Law's Empire.

And so, we do not have much to offer in the way of a conclusion. Maybe all we are left with is an invitation. Would an invitation do in lieu of a conclusion? Something like this?



CASE CITED

Gosselin v. Québec (Attorney General), [2002] 4 S.C.R. 429

NOTES

This project is one of many thank-yous. It is safe to say that without the vision, technical brilliance, and patience of Doug Jarvis, this scrapbook would not have come into being. Thank you also to Rich McCue for setting up our shared website and to Holly Pattison for taking flipchart photos. A special thank you to Lina de Guevara for inspiring and challenging us to think with our bodies. Further thank-yous to Wes Pue and Bob Menzies who enthusiastically accepted our initial conference proposal when we ourselves were not sure about what shape it would take, and to our audience-participants who joined into the spirit of the presentation. Finally, we are so appreciative to everyone at Social and Legal Studies who supported this project, and in particular to three anonymous reviewers whose exchange and suggestions enhanced our piece. Your contributions to this project made it so much richer. The title for our article is a playful combination of the titles of the 2005 Canadian Law and Society Conference 'Law's Empire' and the 1990 Columbia Pictures film, *Postcards from the Edge* (starring Meryl Streep and Shirley MacLaine). Little did we know how postcards would come to be so important in the story of this work, but we will let Margot tell you about that.



This photograph was taken at 'Consent as the Foundation for Political Community', the Inaugural Conference of the Consortium on Democratic Constitutionalism at the University of Victoria, 3 October 2004. The image is, retrospectively, a fascinating catalyst for this project. At the time, we found ourselves talking about the difficulty of engaging in conversations which allow space for many voices. We also felt the need to spontaneously celebrate that we were a critical mass of feminist scholars. Looking back at this image, it is amazing about how much of our journey, as of yet unfolded, is captured by this shot.



This project produced a nice paper trail of what we set out to do: emails, notes, tracked changes, and so forth. This was particularly so at the outset, when we were on a path to a more traditional panel presentation at the *Law's Empire* conference. However, as noted below at note 6, certain conversations may not have happened at specific meetings mentioned. Or they may have, and so we have had to reconstruct minutes from some of our meetings. In our efforts to capture the truth of our experience in reconstructed documents, we have taken comfort in film scholars' explorations of the truth valences of fictional forms, and their reminders that fiction sometimes better captures the truth of an experience than does the effort to 'document' that reality. See Dow (2000); see also Black (2002).

1. John McLaren, the Lansdowne Chair of Law at the University of Victoria, retired in December 2005. Having been one of the founders of the Canadian Law and Society Association there were a series of panels planned to honour John, his work and his contributions at the Harrison Hot Springs meeting. One of the events planned was a letter writing initiative, with his colleagues and friends from across the country writing him letters of reference, as he had done for so many before him. Letter writing was in the text and the subtext of the conference.
2. During the debates about the legalization of same-sex marriage, then opposition leader Stephen Harper (now Prime Minister Harper) commented that he could exclude same-sex couples from marriage without invoking the *Charter's* 'notwithstanding clause' (a provision allowing the government to sustain legislation that violates the *Charter's* rights protections). These comments generated a petition signed by 131 Canadian constitutional law (and other) professors. Part of the story was the conflict experienced by many over whether to sign it or not. It is ultimately part of the story of our presentation that many legal scholars in Canada did not see the letter before it was published, and yet found themselves having to answer (see: <http://www.law.utoronto.ca/samesexletter.html>).
3. *Gosselin v. Québec (Attorney General)*, [2002] 4 S.C.R. 429. *Gosselin* was the first poverty case under the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* to reach the Supreme Court of Canada. Louise Gosselin's claims that as a result of the relevant levels of social assistance provided in Québec she faced discrimination and a violation of her rights to life, liberty and security of the person were dismissed by a majority of the Court.
4. Over the year and a half that we have worked together on this project, many of our conversations on these subjects blurred together. This actual conversation about postcard images may not have happened at this particular meeting. Or it may have. The most important part of the discussion, dear reader, is that it did happen.
5. Lina de Guevara is the Artistic Director of the Puente Theatre Society, based in Victoria, BC. For more information about her and her work, see, for example: <http://puentetheatre.blogspot.com/>.

6. For discussion of the many levels of systemic discrimination and how it works on the ground, see McIntyre (1987–88). For a more fictional, but no less instructive, account of how things can go so wrong for junior female faculty, see White (2003).

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